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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

Sadat Makes His Decision

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
26 November 1971

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Sadat Makes His 1971 Decision

1. Sadat's dramatic pronouncements last weekend were intended principally to set the scene for the UN General Assembly debate likely to occur next week. President Sadat's two key speeches last weekend recalled his pledge of last July to make a "decision" this year on the means to recover Israeli-occupied territories. Capping some bitter criticism over the past few months of US support for Israel, Sadat made a public show of dropping the curtain on Washington's mediation role and virtually terminated his own initiative of last February for an interim agreement to open the Suez Canal. Sadat insisted that, barring Israeli concessions, the diplomatic option is no longer viable, but he carefully did not define a time frame for the use of force.

2. Sadat's commitment to the "year of decision" was first aired in two speeches in late July and reiterated on numerous occasions. The timing of the first references on 26 and 27 July--just prior to Assistant Secretary Sisco's visit to Tel Aviv--strongly suggests that they were intended, in part, to prod the US to lean more heavily on the Israelis. From the beginning, the Egyptian president tempered his militant rhetoric with a pledge to exhaust all diplomatic alternatives before resorting to armed force. Moreover, his admission of Egypt's military inferiority and the need to correct basic deficiencies in the armed forces gives him latitude on the timing for any military moves.

Note: This memorandum was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence with the Office of National Estimates.

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3. Sadat's address to the people's assembly on 11 November represented a considerable stiffening of the Egyptian position toward negotiations. Sadat told the assembly that before any discussion on reopening the canal could go forward the Israelis had to "reply affirmatively" to Ambassador Jarring's request last February for their requirements for a comprehensive settlement. Sadat added another condition last Saturday when he said that Israel must "accept complete withdrawal" as well as respond to the Jarring memorandum.

4. Tel Aviv has consistently and categorically rejected these conditions, and Sadat sees no possibility of the Israelis accepting them now. The Egyptians are very likely trying to create a sense of urgency by abandoning the only active channel for discussion of the Middle East crisis. Despite references to US diplomatic "trickery" in his statements last weekend, Sadat left the door open for a US role, i.e., if Washington should move Israel toward an acceptable settlement.

5. For the moment, the Egyptian script calls for a shift of scene to the UN. By dismissing the US mediation role and flaunting his decision to fight, Sadat is seeking to raise the temperature of the debate which Egypt is expected to launch in the General Assembly sometime next week. Egypt will presumably press for a resolution which calls for the imposition of economic sanctions and an arms embargo if Israel fails to respond to the Jarring memorandum. In all likelihood, Sadat, whose hip pocket is already full of UN resolutions which stop short of calling for punitive sanctions, now wants a document with teeth, even though he knows Assembly resolutions are not binding on the members. The Egyptians may believe that the Organization of African Unity "Wise Men," who undertook a second round of talks in Cairo and Tel Aviv this week, will report findings favorable to the Arab cause in the UN.

6. Should the Egyptians be unable to obtain an acceptable resolution in the Assembly, they may attempt to raise the issue in the Security Council.

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Whatever the forum for debate, the Egyptian objectives will be to focus attention on US support for Israel and to bring international pressure on Washington to wring concessions from Tel Aviv. One underlying assumption in Egyptian policy has always been that the US is the only power that can force Israel to accept terms which would preserve Arab dignity.

7. Even if the Egyptians fail to achieve their ends in the UN, they may see the exercise as stringing out the diplomatic process in the hope that something, in Micawber's terms, "will turn up." Depending on what takes place in the UN, the Egyptians may, at some point, ask the US to renew mediation efforts. At the same time, the Egyptian armed forces will continue to prepare for the "battle" in parallel with what the political leadership describes as the "last steps in the peaceful search for a settlement."

8. Soviet media have handled Sadat's remarks in a way that virtually ignores the hellfire and brimstone and highlights Cairo's efforts to reach a peaceful settlement. Since the six-day war it has been customary for Moscow to put the best face possible on the more extravagant remarks out of Arab capitals. Nasir's speeches were always subject to a great deal of editing before appearing in Soviet news media and, more recently, Moscow went to great lengths to play down Sadat's branding of 1971 as the "year of decision."

9. Several days after Sadat's speech a Soviet official from the Foreign Ministry's Near East Division said that Moscow was not alarmed by the Egyptian leader's war rhetoric. He stated that the speech was tailored for domestic purposes, particularly to satisfy a few military officers bent on action. The Soviet official remarked that Sadat, during his visit to Moscow last month, assured the Soviet leaders that the only "decision" to be taken in 1971 would be a political one. At two public lectures last week, Moscow audiences were told that Sadat's rhetoric was "no more than a pressure tactic on Israel to carry out the 1967 Security Council resolution."

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11. Sadat's pledge to liberate Sinai "with our own blood" must be taken seriously even though the Egyptians will probably maneuver, over the short term at least, in the political arena. Egyptian forces are better prepared now for any sort of engagement with the Israelis than they were in 1967, but they cannot force the Israelis out of the occupied territories, nor have they the capability to hold a piece of the east bank of the Suez Canal for more than a few hours. Still, there is always the danger that the Egyptians could attack out of sheer frustration. Sadat's speech of 20 November would seem to indicate that any major operation is unlikely for some time and there have been no signs that Egyptian forces have been readying for imminent action.

12. They are more likely to decide to launch harassing operations designed to trigger an effort by the big powers to force the Israelis to come to terms. Smaller, harassing operations could be launched at any time, however, and could come without warning. Egyptian commando forces have engaged in extensive training for these.

13. Although it is conceivable that the Egyptians might conduct a raid against an Israeli position in the next few days to dramatize the upcoming UN debate, it is highly unlikely. We believe that the Egyptians would be extremely reluctant to cast themselves in an aggressive role while presenting their case as an aggrieved party in the world body.

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14. There is as yet no clamor from within the Egyptian armed forces or the population at large for an initiation of hostilities and there is no sense of impending warfare in Egypt. The average Egyptian probably still hopes that a political solution giving "peace with honor" can be found. There is a business as usual atmosphere in the marketplace.

15. At the same time, however, speeches like Sadat's could play a part in slowly conditioning the masses to an inevitable battle which will demand heavy sacrifices. While Cairo can, to some extent, manipulate the popular mood, there is some danger that over time the media will amplify the militant propaganda, bellicose hysteria among the people will grow, and Egypt's leaders will come to believe their own propaganda. The period just before the 1967 war demonstrates how quickly the Egyptian national mood can shift from everyday concerns to "the battle of honor." In such an atmosphere, Sadat at some point could come to believe that the time for military action was at hand.

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